



By Kontoglou
Our Righteous Father Ephraim the Syrian.
Whom the Holy Church celebrates on January 28.

Saint Ephraim was born in Nisibis of Mesopotamia some time after the year 306, and in his youth was the disciple of Saint James, Bishop of Nisibis, one of the 318 Fathers at the First Ecumenical Council. Ephraim lived in Nisibis, practicing a severe ascetical life and increasing in holiness until 363, the year in which Julian the Apostate was slain in his war against the Persians, and his successor Jovian surrendered Nisibis to them. Ephraim then made his dwelling in Edessa, where he found many heresies to do battle with. He waged an especial war against Bardaisan; this Gnostic had written many hymns propagating his errors, which by their sweet melodies became popular and enticed many souls away from the truth. Saint Ephraim, having received from God a singular gift of eloquence, turned Bardaisan's own weapon against him, and wrote a multitude of hymns to be chanted by choirs of women, which set forth the true doctrines, refuted heretical error, and praised the contests of the Martyrs.

On the multitude of sermons, commentaries, and hymns that Saint Ephraim wrote, many were translated into Greek in his own lifetime. Sozomen says that Ephraim "surpassed the most approved writers of Greece," observing that the Greek writings, when translated into other languages, lose most of their original beauty, but Ephraim's works "are no less admired when read in Greek

than when read in Syriac”(Eccl. Hist. Book III,16). Saint Ephraim was ordained deacon, some say, by Saint Basil the Great whom Sozomen said “was a great admirer of Ephraim, and was astonished at his erudition.” Saint Ephraim was the first to make the poetic expression of hymnody and song a vehicle of Orthodox theological teachings, constituting it an integral part of the Church’s worship; he may rightly be called the first and greatest hymnographer of the Church, who set the pattern for those who followed him, especially Saint Romanus the Melodist. Because of this he is called the “Harp of the Holy Spirit.” Jerome says that his writings were read in some churches after the reading of the Scriptures, and adds that once he read a Greek translation of one of Ephraim’s works, “and recognized, even in translation, the incisive power of his lofty genius” (De vir. Ill. CXV).

Shortly before the end of his life, a famine broke out in Edessa, and Saint Ephraim left his cell to rebuke the rich for not sharing their goods with the poor. The rich answered that they knew no one to whom they could entrust their goods. Ephraim asked them “What do you think of me?” When they confessed their reverence for him, he offered to distribute their alms, to which they agreed. He himself cared for many of the sick from the famine, and so crowned his life with mercy and love for neighbour. Saint Ephraim reposed in peace, according to some in the year 373, according to others, 379.

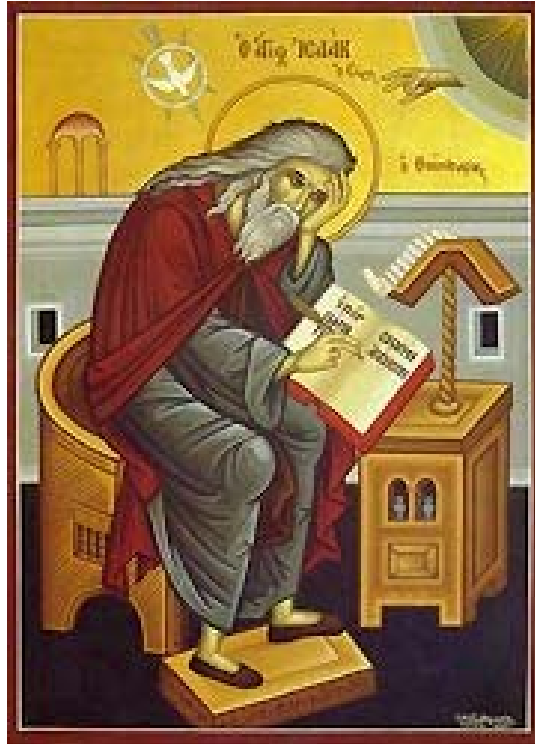
[Ed. Note: When St. Ephraim arrived in Edessa the Icon Not Made by Hands, ἀχειροποίητα, which Christ sent to King Abgar was still displayed on the city walls over the main gate. (See the Feast of the Holy Napkin August 16). The Lord Himself made the first Icon.]

Dismissal Hymn of Saint Ephraim. Plagal of Fourth Tone

WITH the streams of thy tears, thou didst cultivate the barrenness of the desert; and by thy sighings from the depths, thou didst bear fruit a hundredfold in labours; and thou becamest a luminary, shining with miracles upon the world, O Ephraim our righteous father. Intercede with Christ God that our souls be saved.

*Kontakion of Saint Ephraim
Second Tone. Thou soughtest the heights*

AT all times didst thou * forsee the hour of reckoning, * and pricked in thy heart, * thou ever didst lament with tears; * and, O righteous Ephraim, thou wast a mighty teacher in works and deeds. * Hence, O Father for all the world, * thou didst rouse the slothful unto change of heart.



Saint Isaac the Syrian
Whom the Holy Church Celebrates on January 28.

The great luminary of the life of stillness, Saint Isaac, was born in the early seventh century in Eastern Arabia, the present day Qatar in the Persian Gulf. He became a monk at a young age and at some time left Arabia to dwell with monks in Persia. He was consecrated Bishop of Nineveh (and is therefore sometimes called “Saint Isaac of Nineveh”), but after five months received permission to return to solitude; he spent many years far south of Nineveh in the mountainous region of Beit Huzaye, and lastly at the Monastery of Rabban Shabur. He wrote his renowned and God-inspired *Ascetical Homilies* toward the end of his long life of monastic struggle, about the end of the seventh century. The fame of his *Homilies* grew quickly, and after about one hundred years after their composition they were translated from Syriac into Greek by two monks of the monastery of Mar Sabbas in Palestine, from which they spread throughout the monasteries of the Roman Empire and became a guide to hesychasts of all generations thereafter.

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Dismissal Hymn of Saint Isaac
Plagal of First Tone. Let us worship the Word

HE that thundered on Sinai with saving laws for man * hath also given thy writings as guides in prayer unto monks, * O revealer of unfathomable mysteries; * for having gone up in the mount * of the vision of the Lord, thou wast shown the many mansions. Wherefore, O God-bearing Isaac, entreat the Saviour for all praising thee.

Kontakion of Saint Isaac. Plagal of Fourth Tone
To thee, the Champion Leader

AS an ascetic and God-bearer great in righteousness * and an instructor of monastics do we honour thee, * thou revealer of things sacred, and our protector. * But, O Isaac, since thou hast great boldness with the Lord, * intercede with Him for all of us who sing thy praise * and who cry to thee: * Rejoice, O Father most wise in God.

OIKOS

WISHING to follow in the steps of the Forerunner, O Fathers, ye removed yourselves from the world, dwelling in solitude. Entering into a Jordan of tears, ye rose up cleansed and illuminated, and with your writings, ye have taught us also how to blot out our sins with the waters of repentance. Wherefore, O God-bearing Ephraim and Isaac, with songs of praise and hymns of gratitude, we cry out to you: Rejoice, O Fathers most wise in God.

SYNAXARION

On the twenty-eighth of this month we commemorate our righteous and God-bearing Fathers Ephraim and Isaac the Syrians, the authors of sacred and God-inspired books.

Verses

Ephraim, whose eyes were a Tigris and Euphrates,
Hath now found the place where no weeping can enter.

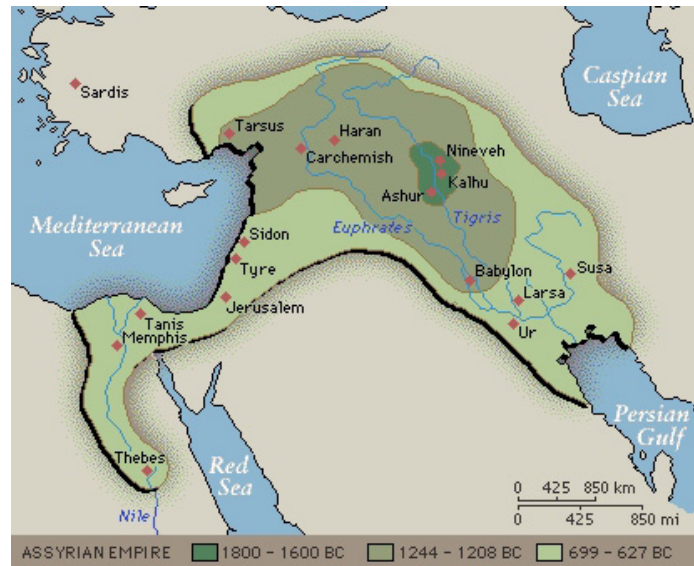
Of the age to come, the mystery is silence;

Our Righteous Fathers Ephraim and Isaac the Syrians.

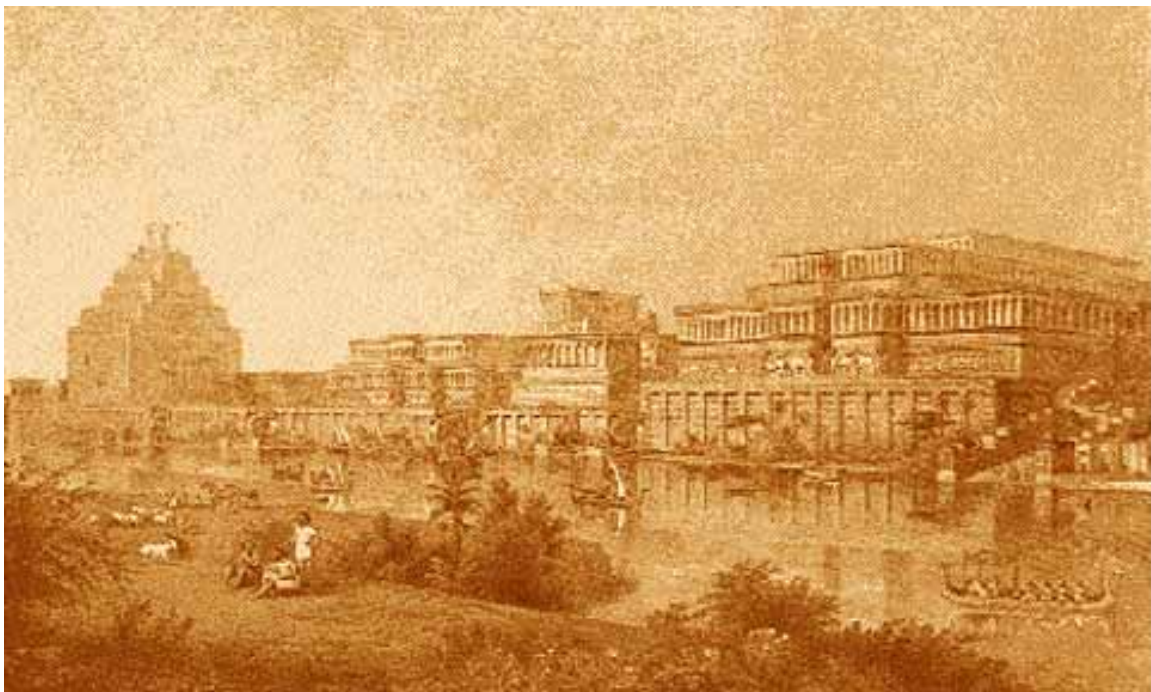
But in this one, I laud thee with words, O Isaac.

On the twenty-eighth Angels take Ephraim and Isaac.

O+O+O+O+O+O+O+



Location of Nineveh



Ancient Nineveh on the Tigris River